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INFORMATION NOTE ON THE CIS CONFERENCE PROCESS

1. At its forty-ninth session on 23 December 1994, the General Assembly adopted resolution 49/173, Comprehensive consideration and review of the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and related migratory movements.

2. In it, the General Assembly reaffirmed the need for the international community to consider comprehensive regional approaches to the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and related migratory movements, and:

> (a) call[ed] upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in consultation with concerned States and in coordination with relevant intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations, to continue to consider comprehensive regional approaches to the problems of refugees and displaced persons;
>
> (b) also call[ed] upon the High Commissioner to continue her efforts to promote and develop a preparatory process, leading to the convening, not later than 1996, of a regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring States, and urge[d] States and the intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations concerned to support that process, including follow-up measures.

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3. General Assembly resolution 49/173 mandated UNHCR to initiate a process which would involve a great number of actors in the international community, in particular Governments, international and regional governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as development agencies and financial institutions. UNHCR is currently acting in close partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). The three organizations share the same concern over the magnitude and complexity of actual and potential migration and refugee issues in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and neighbouring countries. They also recognize the complementary of mandates, approaches and procedures.

4. A UNHCR/IOM/OSCE ad hoc Secretariat for the preparation of the preliminary meetings and of the Conference was established within UNHCR in January 1995 for a 15-month period. The Secretariat focuses on achieving the following objectives: to steer the preparatory process for the CIS Conference through consultations and negotiations with the parties concerned in close cooperation with interested Governments and international organizations; to support the process in terms of logistics, secretarial support, translation, interpretation, supplies and documentation, as well as participation in the conference and meetings; to coordinate the provision of expert inputs and studies on relevant subjects; and to provide all related public information functions.

5. A joint UNHCR/IOM appeal for the Conference Secretariat was launched on 20 January 1995. The overall meeting and conference costs for UNHCR are budgeted at a total of $ 748,000 for the period 1 January 1995 to 31 March 1996. A contribution of $ 384,476 is required to cover IOM's costs.

6. Between December 1994 and August 1995, six informal meetings with representatives of concerned and interested Governments and international organizations were held in Geneva to give direction to the preparatory process. Among the first tasks of the Steering Group were, to clarify the objectives of the process and prepare for the first Meeting of Experts.

7. A series of national consultations took place during February, March and April 1995 in Ukraine, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova, with the first regional consultation taking place in March in the Kyrgyzstan for the five Central Asian Republics. Consultations have also taken place in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Baltic States.

8. A first Meeting of Experts was held on 18 and 19 May 1995 in Geneva. It was attended by the following countries and international organizations:

> The CIS: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine;

Other interested States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States of America;

International organizations: Centre for Human Rights, Council of Europe, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Labour Organization, OSCE/ODIHR, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the United Nations Office at Geneva;

Other institutions: European Commission.

9. The main tasks of the first Meeting of Experts were to identify the issues of concern and to prepare the workplan for the Conference.

10. The types of movements to be addressed in the process were identified as follows: refugees, displaced persons, resettlers, formerly deported peoples, irregular migration, trafficking in migrants, stranded migrants and ecological migration. In addition, the following general issues were raised.

(a) Inadequacies of current terminology related to refugees and displaced persons. Agreement was reached on the need for a more uniform and harmonized use of terminology in national legislation and regional agreements. It was recognized that the refugee definition contained in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees might not fully cover current regional needs. It was also felt that various involuntary movements taking place in the region would not fall within existing norms and standards.

(b) National implementation of international instruments. It was recognized that there is a gap between international instruments and implementation at the national level; the lack of effective implementation of international obligations is due to economic, social, and political difficulties inherent in the transition process. Proper guidance and technical advisory services should be provided, in particular to assist in the establishment of appropriate administrative structures.

(c) Emergency preparedness. A need was perceived for contingency plans and the establishment of a structure conducive to the reception and provision of relief to refugees and displaced persons.

(d) There was recognition of the need for a harmonized regional approach to be adopted and subsequently implemented in the areas of preventive action, management of displacement crises and burden sharing mechanisms. It was also felt that a unified approach should be used for promotion and training activities, including the organization of conferences and seminars at the regional and sub-regional level.

(e) It was proposed that an in-depth study of the root causes underlying displacement in the region as well an assessment of the psychological impact of population displacement be undertaken.

(f) It was recognized that many countries in the region require assistance in the strengthening of their administrative systems in order to be able to deal with migration challenges.

(g) There was recognition of the need for cooperation amongst the countries themselves, amongst international organizations, and within the broader international community.

11. A draft work plan was submitted to the Meeting of Experts and later refined in light of comments received by the Secretariat. The plan is at present structured as follows: a series of sub-regional meetings to be held between July and September 1995, where country representatives will analyse the issues of concern identified in the first Meeting of Experts; a second Meeting of Experts envisaged for November 1995, when possible solutions will be discussed on the basis of the conclusions of the sub-regional meetings and of the input provided by the non-governmental sector; a drafting committee to be convened simultaneously to start drafting a Declaration of Principles and a Programme of Action; a third Meeting of Experts tentatively scheduled for December 1995; and a preparatory conference and the conference itself, planned for the first quarter of 1996. The Steering Group will continue to meet at regular intervals, in Geneva, throughout the process.

12. The first two sub-regional meetings were held in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 10 and 11 July, for the Transcaucasus region, and in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan, on 27 July, for the Central Asian Republics. In both meetings, participants reviewed and discussed existing terminology, and agreed on a common set of terms to be used to define the various categories of persons moving within the region. Effects of population displacement were analysed thoroughly and governmental responses assessed. Finally, the issues of emergency preparedness, early warning, migration management, return and reintegration were tackled.

13. The overall objective of the process initiated in 1994 is to provide a wide and open forum for the international community, and particularly the concerned countries, to acknowledge, review and discuss all population movements taking place in the CIS and neighbouring region in a humanitarian and non-political framework. In addition, the main objective of the process would be to devise an integrated strategy for the region through the drafting of a Declaration of Principles and a Programme of Action. In the long run, a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each of the concerned parties should be reached. This would be reflected in an accountability framework, which would pave the way for achieving durable solutions to existing problems and for preventing potential ones. The plan, endorsed and supported by the international community, would enable countries to cope with the migration challenges faced by the CIS region.

14. The primary and ultimate beneficiaries of this endeavour are persons in need of UNHCR protection and assistance in the region, as well as those of concern to IOM.

15. The CIS Conference process would contribute to strengthening institutional cooperation not only among international and regional governmental organizations, but also with NGOs concerned with population displacements in the CIS and neighbouring countries. Therefore, the CIS Conference Secretariat welcomes the collaborative effort between the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the Open Society Institute and other NGOs active in the region. In this regard, the Secretariat has been requested to ensure the linkage between the intergovernmental and the non-governmental processes.

16. The CIS Conference Secretariat has kept the NGO community fully informed by organizing briefing sessions at each stage of the process. In addition, a meeting will be organized in October 1995 to discuss possible solutions with NGOs, academics and other independent actors. The conclusions of the meeting will be submitted to the second Meeting of Experts. In addition, following a suggestion from the Open Society Institute to organize consultations at the field level with local and international NGOs active in the region, meetings with local NGOs have taken place in Tbilisi and Moscow in July 1995. Similar meetings are planned for autumn 1995 in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, Kiev, Ukraine, and Novosibirsk, Russian Federation.